

Gorbachev urges sharing of power

By Quentin Peel in Moscow

MR Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet leader, yesterday held open the door for the ruling Communist Party to co-operate with other political parties in a future multi-party system, while insisting that it must still remain part of the country's government.

In his most radical statement yet on the implications of the party's recent decision to abandon its constitutional monopoly on power, he declared that it must fight now to transform its leading role "from a formal declaration, into a political reality."

His speech, on the fifth anni-

versary of his election as Communist Party General Secretary, was delivered to an extraordinary plenum of the party's ruling central committee, which was intended to endorse new party rules - and confirm Mr Gorbachev as its candidate for the new post of executive president, to be created this week.

He called on the stricken ranks of Communist Party leaders themselves to propose the necessary changes in the constitution this week which would "formalise equal possibilities for the Communist Party and other political and

social organisations to take part in social and legal affairs."

At the same time Mr Gorbachev proposed new party rules which would, in effect, destroy the tradition of "democratic centralism" by which the party leadership enforced unswerving obedience to the policy determined by the centre.

His speech came as pro-democracy radicals stepped up their attacks on the plans for a presidency, insisting that the Congress of People's Deputies, the country's supreme constitutional authority, had no mandate to consider such a sweeping change in the power

structure.

The position will give Mr Gorbachev far-reaching powers to declare a state of emergency, rule by decree, veto parliamentary legislation, and most critically, to distance himself from the political control of his own Communist Party.

The radical Inter-Regional Group of Deputies, led by Mr Boris Yeltsin, the leading rebel within the Communist Party, yesterday denounced the plan, insisting that a referendum be held first, and every union republic be consulted.

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Nationalists from the Baltic republics, and from Georgia, are also expected to boycott the vote, in part because the new presidency amounts to a reinforcement of central authority just when they are seeking radical devolution of power. The deputies from Lithuania are expected to stay away, because of their decision to opt for outright independence.

Their decision means that the Soviet leader cannot automatically expect the necessary two thirds majority in the Congress of People's Deputies for the constitutional changes he

is seeking.

Mr Gorbachev was also expected yesterday to face renewed criticism from the conservative wing of the ruling party, deeply disturbed at the social unrest spreading across the Soviet Union, and the rebellion against Communist Party authority in many key industrial areas across the country.

Yet in classic style Mr Gorbachev switched from defence to attack, taking the political debate in the party further down the path of reform, albeit dressed up in familiar ideological language.

"We declare that the Communist Party stands on the positions of internationalism, and is open to co-operation with Communist and workers' parties, with socialist and social democratic, liberal and national democratic parties, with all public forces and movements that are for peace and social progress," he said, according to Tass, the Soviet news agency.

He said that the "struggle for political leadership in the framework of democratic procedures and election campaigns" would from now on become one of the most impor-

tant functions of the party - and its rules must reflect it.

At the same time he insisted that the party, as a ruling party, bore political responsibility for the state of the country. For that reason, he said "trivial parliamentary games are not for this party. This demands that the Soviet Communist Party should not keep away from participation in the solution of the vital problems of the country."

Mr Gorbachev even dared to consider - and reject - suggestions that the party abandon the name Communist